

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A method of providing supply to a space platform, comprising:
2 launching a supply canister into orbit using a launch vehicle, wherein the supply
3 canister includes at least two docking ports and is adapted to allow for the at
4 least two docking ports to be used simultaneously;
5 docking an intermediate space vehicle to a first docking port of the at least two
6 docking ports while the supply canister is docked to the launch vehicle element
7 at a second docking port of the at least two docking ports, wherein the launch
8 vehicle element is at least a stabilized component of the launch vehicle used to
9 launch the supply canister into orbit;
10 using the intermediate space vehicle to position the supply canister relative to the
11 space platform; and
12 docking the supply canister to the space platform while the intermediate space
13 vehicle is attached to the supply canister.

1 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of pressurizing the
2 supply cargo canister.

1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the stabilization provided by the
2 launch vehicle is three-axis stabilization.

1 4. The method of claim 1, further comprising signalling between two
2 docking elements to facilitate a docking of the supply canister to a first of the two
3 docking elements while the supply canister is docked to the second of the two docking
4 elements, wherein such signalling passes through signalling extensions of the supply
5 canister.

1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the first docking element is the
2 intermediate space vehicle and the second docking element is the launch vehicle element.

1 6. The method of claim 4, wherein the first docking element is the space
2 platform and the second docking element is the intermediate space vehicle.

1 7. The method of claim 4, wherein the signalling is passive radar.

1 8. The method of claim 4, wherein the signalling is active radar.

1 9. The method of claim 4, wherein the signalling is rendezvous signalling.

1 10. A supply canister, usable in orbit, comprising:
2 an internal space for containing supply materiel; and
3 at least two docking ports adapted to allow for simultaneous docking of two
4 elements,
5 wherein the supply canister relies on a docket element to provide at least one of
6 orbital stability and propulsion from one or both of the docked elements.

1 11. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the supply canister is an
2 unpressurized canister.

1 12. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the supply canister is a
2 pressurized canister.

1 13. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the supply canister has no
2 means for propulsion while in orbit and no means for stabilizing the supply canister
3 against rotation while in orbit and has means for connecting supply canister electrical
4 system with an electrical system of an element docked at a docking port of the supply
5 canister.

1 14. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the supply canister is
2 approximately cylindrical and the at least two docking ports include one docking port at a
3 first axial location of an approximate cylinder and a second docking port at a second axial
4 location opposite the first axial location.

1 15. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the supply canister is
2 approximately cylindrical and the at least two docking ports include one docking port at a
3 first axial location of an approximate cylinder and a second docking port at a second axial
4 location opposite the first axial location.

1 16. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the supply canister is
2 approximately cylindrical and is shaped to support pressurization without concentrated
3 stress points.

1 17. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the at least two docking ports
2 include a first docking port at a first axial location of an approximate cylinder that is a
3 Cone docking port and a second docking port at a second axial location opposite the first
4 axial location that is a Probe docking port.

1 18. The supply canister of claim 10, further comprising a power
2 subsystem for supplying power to canister components.

1 19. The supply canister of claim 10, further comprising a communication
2 subsystem for communicating with elements docked to the supply canister or elements to
3 be docked to the supply canister.

1 20. The supply canister of claim 10, further comprising a rendezvous
2 subsystem for assisting in automated or semi-automated docking of the supply canister
3 with a docking element..

1 21. The supply canister of claim 10, further comprising:
2 a power subsystem for supplying power to canister components;
3 a communication subsystem for communicating with elements docked to the supply
4 canister or elements to be docked to the supply canister; and
5 a rendezvous subsystem for assisting in automated or semi-automated docking of the
6 supply canister with a docking element..

1 22. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the at least two docking ports
2 include a first docking port that is a Cone docking port and a second docking port that is a
3 Probe docking port, wherein the supply canister is adapted to be docked to an
4 intermediate space vehicle at the Cone docking port and a launch vehicle at the Probe
5 docking port simultaneously.

1 23. The supply canister of claim 10, wherein the at least two docking ports
2 include a first docking port that is a Cone docking port and a second docking port that is a
3 Probe docking port, wherein the supply canister is adapted to be docked to an
4 intermediate space vehicle at the Cone docking port and a space platform at the Probe
5 docking port simultaneously.

1 24. A supply canister, usable in orbit, comprising:

2 an internal space for containing supply materiel; and
3 at least two docking ports adapted to allow for simultaneous docking of two
4 elements; and
5 pass-through signal means for passing signals between a first element docked to the
6 supply canister and a second element to which the supply canister is to be
7 docked.

1 25. The supply canister of claim 24, wherein the docking elements are an
2 intermediate space vehicle and a launch vehicle element.

1 26. The supply canister of claim 24, wherein the docking elements are a
2 space platform and an intermediate space vehicle.

1 27. The supply canister of claim 24, wherein the signalling is passive
2 radar.

1 28. The supply canister of claim 24, wherein the signalling is active radar.

1 29. The supply canister of claim 24, wherein the signalling is rendezvous
2 signalling.